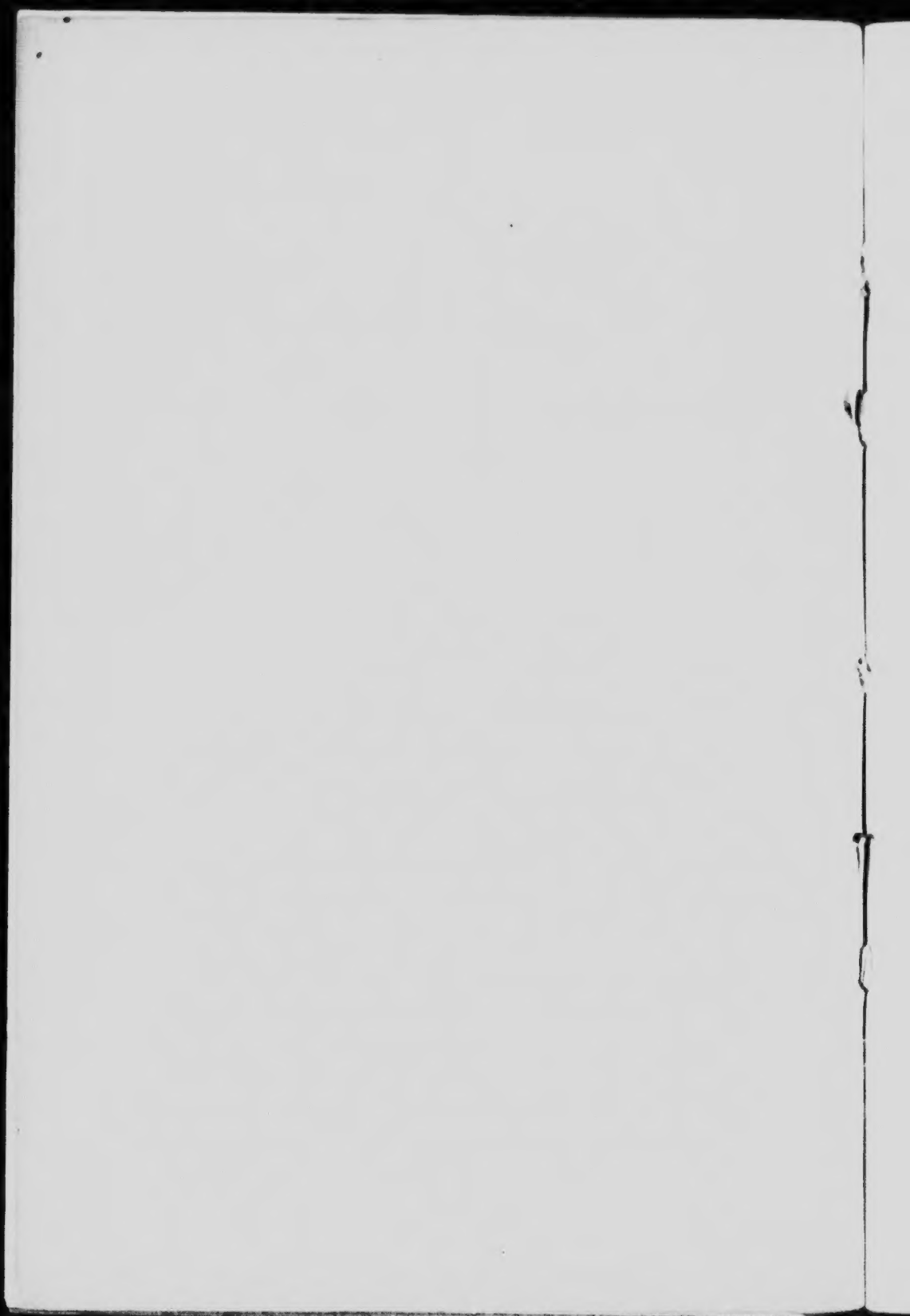


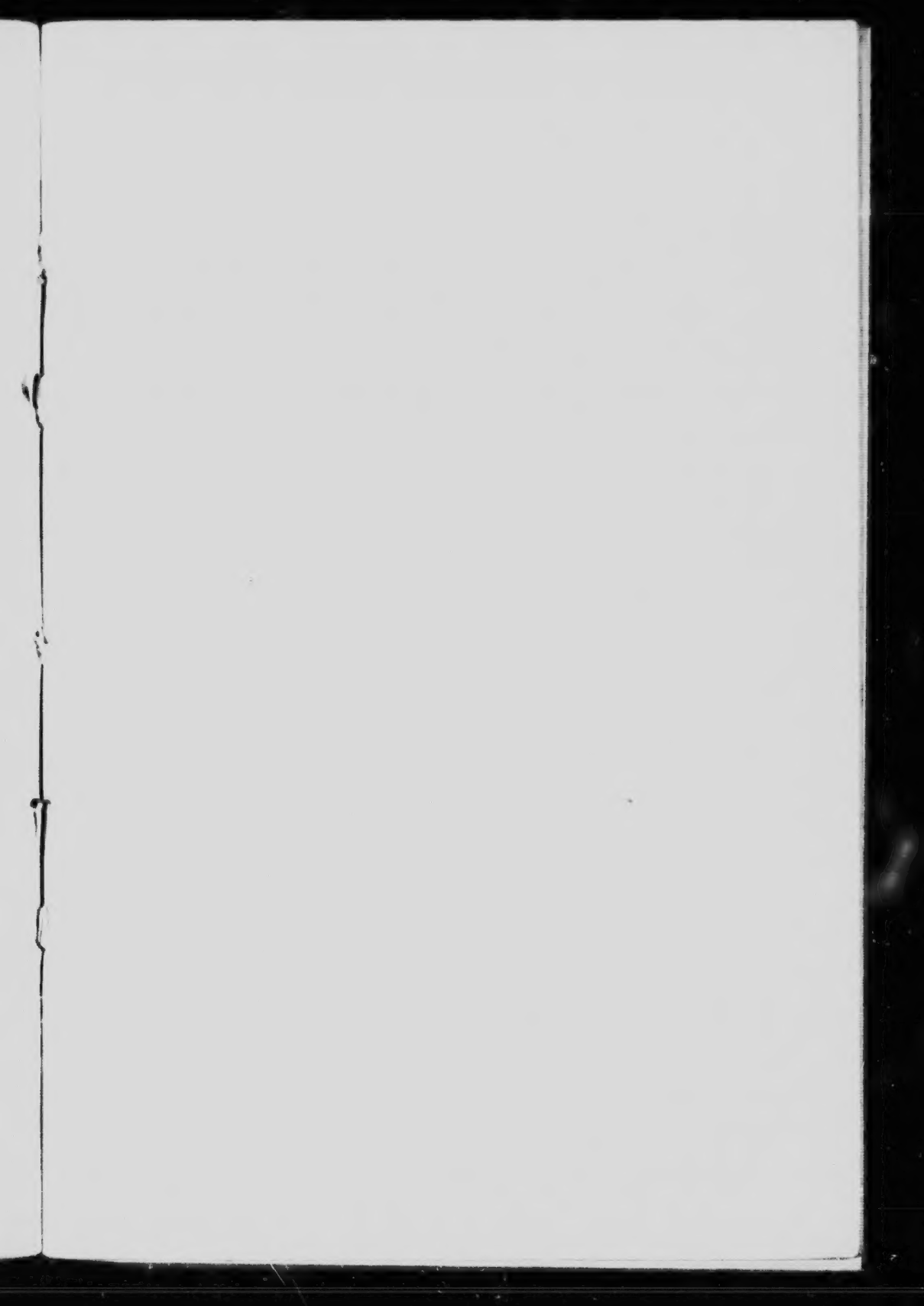


The Road  
to  
Arras



BY  
EDGAR W. McINNIS







Edgar W. MacDunnis

# The Road to Arras

BY  
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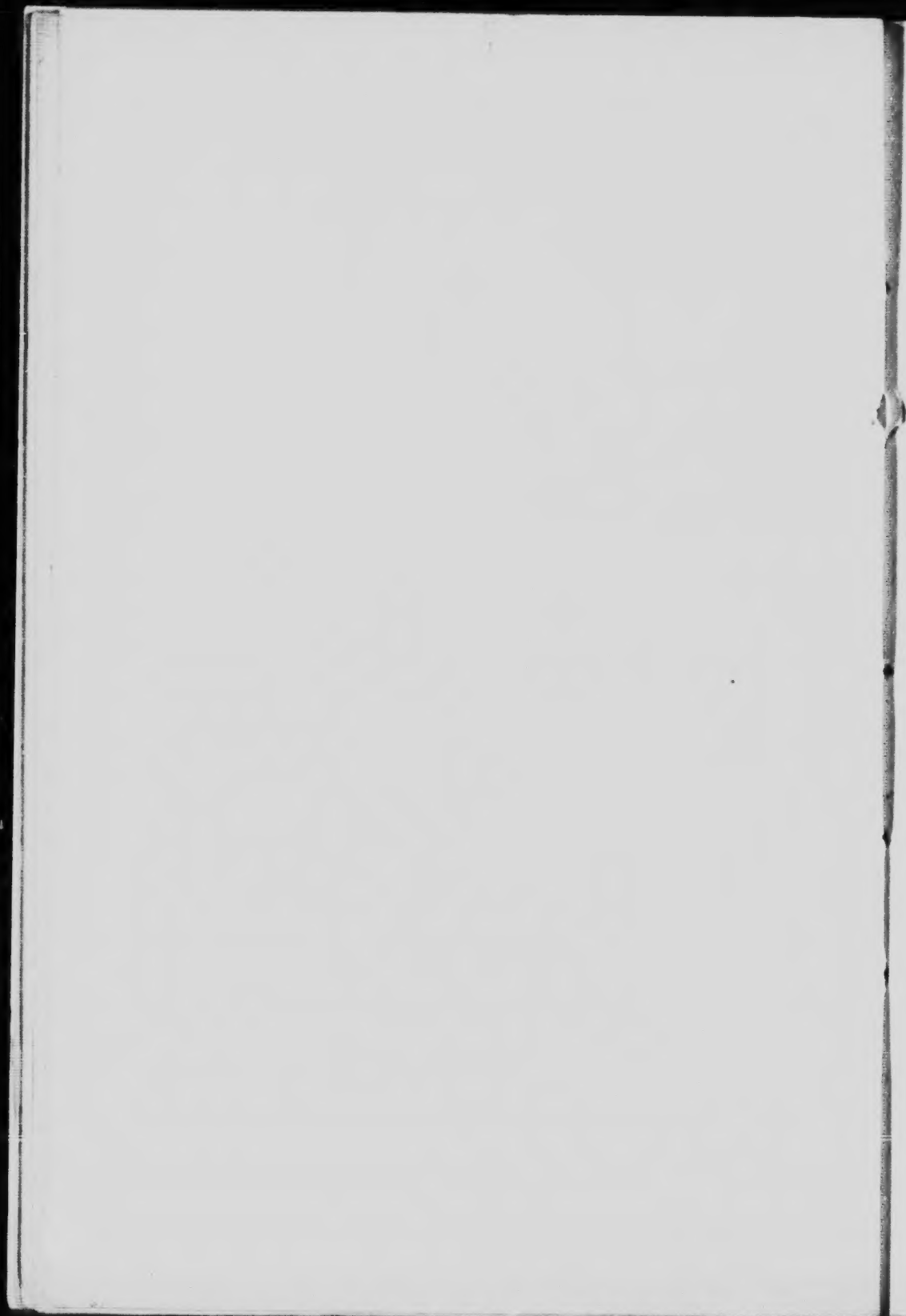
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TO  
*James Warburton, M.D.*

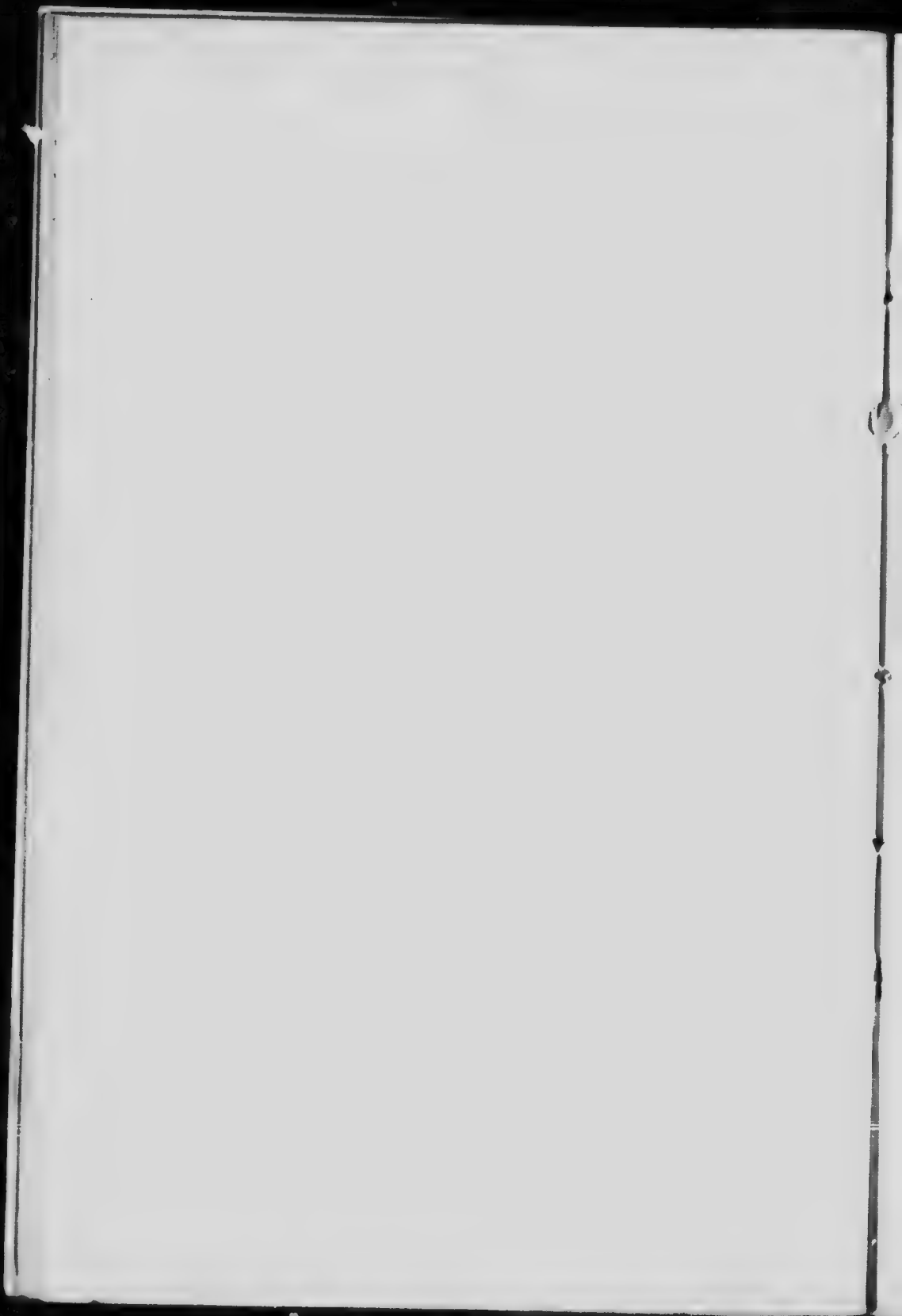
THESE VERSES ARE  
DEDICATED

BY  
*The Author*



**N**OW we cease from our hasting and strife,  
and we turn once again  
From the wind-scuttered wilderness trail  
that has battered our feet  
To the deep-sinking moss and the pines where the  
slow shadows meet,  
When the wine-laden dusk is aglow and all golden  
with mist.  
For the days of our peril are past, but the visions  
remain,  
And the ghosts of dead memories haunt us with  
whispers of fears—  
Of the struggle and suffering and scars and the  
long leaden years,  
Of the love of strong men and the glory we else  
would have missed—

O heights we have known, and once knowing may  
never forget:  
And the pitiless night, and the pitfalls that yawned  
in our way,  
Till we stood on the crest of the hill at the stirring  
of day,  
With a song on our lips, and the flush of the dawn  
in our eyes.  
In the valley the roses are sweet, and we take no  
regret  
As we come down the broad level highway at peace  
from our wars,  
But by anguish and toil we have conquered the  
road to the stars,  
And have carren our triumphs anew in the heart  
of the skies.



## The Road to Arras

**A** LONG the road to Arras we were swinging  
through the gloom  
Ere the morning stars grew pale to greet the  
light,  
And the dawn-mist wrapped the valley in the  
silence of the tomb,  
And the road before our eyes lay long and white.  
We were gray with dust and weary; we were  
hungry, worn and parched,  
And from our lagging steps the spring had gone,  
But our hearts were strong and singing as along  
the road we marched—  
Along the road to Arras in the dawn.

Never breath of wind was stirring through the  
towering poplar tops,  
Never sound save our own footsteps crunching by  
Till we reached the last grey hilltop where the  
roadway turns and drops,  
As the first dim ray of daylight flushed the sky;  
Then a lark's song broke the stillness with a  
joyous melody,  
Till its little throat seemed bursting with its lay,  
And a breeze blew up the valley, laden sweet and  
heavily  
With the perfume of the flowers along the way.

So we came at last to Arras—ah, but who can  
ever tell

All the fiery hopes and aching fears we knew?  
All the pain of those who faltered, all the grief  
for those who fell,

And the raging, roaring hell we journeyed  
through—

All the folly and the glory and the shameful  
waste of war,

All the gain that may be loss before the end—

Dust and ashes in our memories that hold but  
one thing more—

Those tragic mounds—and every mound a friend.

O the long white road to Arras where the poplars  
sentinel!

And the plain below the road—the shell-swept  
plain

Where we raised the rough white crosses to the  
friends we loved so well

Who will never, never tramp the road again!

We are far away from Arras, where the white  
Cathedral gleams

O'er the valley when the morning mist has gone,  
But when darkness pales to dawning we go  
swinging in our dreams

Along the road to Arras—

To battered, shell-scarred Arras—

The road we tramped to Arras in the dawn.

## The Sentinel

*("Fritz has the contract for lighting the Western Front"—Soldier Saying.)*

FROM sullen dusk to pallid dawn,  
With eyes that may not close,  
I watch the crimson sky grow wan  
And flush again to rose;  
The blood-red of the sunset gate  
Fades into ghastlier light—  
The throbbing, pulsing fires of hate  
That sear the robe of night.

O'er shattered wall and sunken road  
Their quivering flames are hurled—  
The glory of the gods, bestowed  
Upon our wildered world,  
The secrets of the void profound,  
The mysteries of life,  
Melted and fused, and showered around  
In pools of anguished strife—

Ah, lights that reel 'twixt earth and sky  
In stabbing, searching pain!  
Their scarlet spears shall leap and die  
And flicker high again  
Until the last dim fire has glowed—  
For they can only be  
The lights that mark the winding road  
Whose end is victory.

## Over the Line

**O**NLY a shadowy, slender thread  
Running to God Knows Where,  
Caught on a cross-arm overhead,  
Shining like silver there,  
Stretching as far as the eye can see,  
Tiny and taut and fine—  
Oh, but the things that have come to me  
Over the line—

Word of the foe in a wild retreat;  
Victory won and lost;  
Triumph, close-snatched from a black defeat—  
Tales of the red, sad cost—  
Stories of grim gaunt men at bay,  
Speeding with wings divine,  
Tell all the world how they fought that day—  
Over the line.

Only a silvery strand, it sings  
Ever its cheery song,  
Thrilling and throbbing with wondrous things,  
Passing the word along,  
Speeding the message on swifter wing,  
Bringing the longed-for sign—  
Victory lives in the words that ring  
Over the line.



## My Princess

**H**ER little wooden shoes go patter-patter-  
pat

On the cobbles of the sunny old French street,  
As she toddles down the hill with a rat-a-tat-a-  
tat,

And there's music in the clatter of her feet—  
Oh, her hair is molten sunshine with the shadows  
flitting through,

And her big round eyes are twinkling, shining  
stars,

And her laughter is the sweetest that the old  
world ever knew

Since the fairies fluttered through the rainbow  
bars.

So I count myself her subject, and I stand to  
serve her needs

And I come to lay my homage at her feet,  
But she laughs and clatters by me, and she never  
looks nor heeds—

And when she laughs she looks so wondrous  
sweet!

And I'm sad when she is sorrowful, and glad  
when she is gay,

And every day I love her more and more,  
But she tramples on the heart of me, and laugh-  
ing goes her way—

My little Princess—aged just four.

Oh, her kingdom lies before her, for my heart is  
all her own,  
And the little tyrant rules by smile and frown.  
With a rag doll for her sceptre, and a wooden  
stool her throne,  
And her royal robe a tattered gingham gown,  
And she only asks a sugar-plum as tribute to her  
sway,  
Or a kiss, perhaps, to drive away the blues,  
But I know the great big universe keeps rolling  
on its way  
To the clatter of her little wooden shoes.



## The Adventurers

**N**OT in the rush of a broken cause—not in a  
shameful war—  
Not in the mad, hot haste of fear shall we go  
forth once more,  
Not with despondent and senile steps will we  
turn from the beaten track—  
We will arise in the pride of night, as we did in  
the years long back.  
  
Years long back, when our riotous blood nor  
quiet, nor peace could brook,  
We who were born to the Lonesome Trail the  
paths of our sires forsook,

Spurning the ancient, trusted things for the  
things of doubtful worth,  
Playing the game of life and death at the ends of  
the careless earth.

Oft have we drunken and diced with Death—  
laughed in his face with the best—  
Little we recked of his ghastly grin as we matched  
him jest for jest—  
Oft would we gladly have bailed him friend; oft  
have we pledged his health—  
Now we would meet him in open fray, lest he  
come in the night by stealth.

Over the ribbed, ridged comb of the world our  
vagabond road runs red—  
We who were born to the Lonesome Trail, we  
may not die in bed—  
Better to fall in the last grim fight on the crimson  
corpse-ringed hill,  
So that old England may know with pride that  
her sons are English still!



## Killed in Action

**S**UDDEN the darkness closes on the plain,  
And rolls across the hills;  
The lark drops earthward, and his magic strain  
No longer thrills—

Cometh the night, and snatches from our hands  
The love we sought to hold,  
And leaves us vagrant in unfriendly lands,  
Weary and old,

And one strong heart with valiant upward flight  
The barriers withdrawn,  
Goes forth adventuring into the night  
To find the dawn.



## The Gun

**A** SHARP command from the misty dark,  
And we brace ourselves for the big gun's  
bark,  
For the echoing bang that splits the night,  
And the sudden flash of the blinding light  
That etches clear, for a moment's space,  
The tense, hard lines on each straining face:  
Then the darkness folds like a robe again,  
And the squeaking scotches groan and strain,  
And we hark once more, as the orders come,  
To the quivering "plunk" as the shell drives  
home,  
To the leathery squeal as the wheel-brakes jam,  
To the thudding clang of the breech-block's slam;  
Then our palms fly up to our mud-stained cheeks,  
And we close our ears as the big gun speaks.

Oh, the enemy search for her night and day,  
And they batter an old estaminet  
Or the church by the square where our cables run,  
But they never come nigh to the crouching gun!  
For she sits secure by the battered wall,  
And she bides her time while the stray shells fall--  
Yes, she waits and waits till the last one rips,  
With a sneering laugh on her cruel lips,  
Then she wakes to life with a shattering roar,  
And we feed her the shells, and she calls for more,  
And she hurls them North and East and South  
Like bitter oaths from her blackened mouth--  
Oh, well do the enemy know their path,  
And they fear our gun when she roars her wrath!

So she works for us, and we work for her,  
And together we swing from ridge to spur,  
And our trail lies plain to the shuddering skies  
In the sanguine stream of our sacrifice;  
For we stride the length of the lonely land,  
And we scatter death with an open hand  
To the foe as they crouch in their death-outrights deep--  
Be they wide awake, be they fast asleep,  
Still we search them out and we mark them well,  
And we leave their fate to the screaming shell  
That our big gun speeds on its hellish way . . . . .  
Till over the town the dawn breaks grey,  
And the darkness drives from the far hill-crest;  
Then we leave our gun for a well-earned rest.

## Canadians in London

**W**E knew her clothed in sombre black and grey,  
The glittering tinsel doffed and flung aside,  
And in her clear, calm eyes a steadfast pride  
That silenced grief and brushed the tears away;  
We deemed her cold, until we learned to prize  
The yearning warmth beneath her chill disdain--  
Her heart's high courage in the hour of pain,  
And the rich wonder of her sacrifice—

So when the closing menace grips no more,  
And she in her accustomed glory moves,  
Radiant and lovely, we shall still recall  
How first we knew her—mourning vanished loves  
With unbowed head, and dauntless brows that  
bore  
Thorns as a diadem imperial.



## Rouge Croix

*("Rouge Croix" is the name of a cross-road at  
the entrance to the trenches near Neuve Chapelle.  
The name is self-explanatory.)*

**B**EFORE the wayside shrine we fall  
While yet the hours are terror-free,  
Awhile to pray, awhile recall  
The blood-red Cross of Calvary—

O Christ, in hours of sharp alarm—  
In dark defeat or triumph's thrill—  
Grant us to feel Thy strengthening arm,  
To know that Thou art with us still;

Alike within the quiet room,  
In that dim hush that hides the dark,  
Or mid the raging shock of doom  
Be Thou our Light and Guiding Mark—

Pierce through our stubborn, blinded night,  
On our weak hearts Thy strength outpour,  
That they before Thy radiant light  
May set unsealed an open door.

From craven fear that bids us flee,  
From vengeful hate that seeks its vent,  
From pride that holds aloof from Thee,  
And rebel guilt impenitent.

From our unnumbered, ancient sins,  
And all our petty, sordid dross,  
Cleanse us, O Christ, ere battle dims  
The vision of Thy Crimson Cross.

And let our humble hearts atone  
As in Thy presence now we bend,  
That in Thy strength, and Thine alone,  
We may endure unto the end.

## The Sisters

**W**HEN the world with flaming wrath was  
throbbing,

When the earth and sky were dripping red,  
When the night wind through the trees was  
sobbing—

Sobbing for the still unburied dead.

When we lay with bodies shattered, broken—

Death had been a sweet release from pain—

With the words of anguish still unspoken,

Watching with dull eyes the spreading stain.

Then they came, with cooling, soothing fingers,

With the tranquil smile that speaks of peace,

Quieting the frame where torment lingers,

As they bade the raging fever cease—

By their acts of mercy all unnumbered,

By their tenderness and constant care,

By the hours they toiled while others slumbered ,

When we would have yielded to despair.

By the battles fought at death's dark portal,

When they gave themselves our lives to bind,

They have won a crown that is immortal—

Deep, abiding love of all mankind.

Wherefore we, their debtors past all measure,

Though our faltering words be weak and crude,

Bear them for the life and love we treasure,

Boundless and undying gratitude.



## Les Blessés

*These are they  
Who having held the cup a moment's space  
And drunk one draught of nectar, rich and warm,  
Behold the crystal broken in the dust—  
Dashed from their hands by some too scurvy Fate,  
And the divine glad essence of the gods  
That scarce had touched their lips, now trickles  
slow  
O'er the dull earth that can but dross its gold  
And waste the vintage sweet in bitterness  
Before their eyes, who yearn to taste again  
Its magic preciousness, now lost for aye.*

Because we dared to count our manhood free,  
And grasp the naked sword,  
And stand, defiant of eternity,  
To back our trusted word—  
Because we would not wait in fear and wonder  
Till Death should come to claim us for his own,  
But battered on his gates, and braved their  
thunder,  
And haled him forth alone.

Death rose before us sudden in his might  
And gazed into our eyes,  
And found therein no shrinking nor affright,  
Nor any swift surprise.  
But deep—so deep we thought it wholly ban-  
ished—  
The quivering terror in our souls lay bare . . . .

He laughed, and brushed us with his wing, and  
vanished,  
And left us stricken there.

And we whom Youth had once made strong to  
run  
Now creep in weariness,  
And through our days a thread of pain is spun  
To bind our helplessness;  
Heartsick we face the drab grey years, scarce  
daring,  
To seek amid the aloes and the rue  
The balm of one fond love, in pity caring  
To heal our faith anew . . . . .

*For these are they  
Who having known the glory of the dawn,  
And watched the sunrise broaden into day,  
Now stumble onward through a twilight cold  
Ere yet the sun has sipped the dregs of dew;  
And we who still walk upright in the light  
Because the groping shadow passed us by,  
Go humbly on our way with bended heads,  
In helpless shame before their suffering.  
Shoulder to shoulder we have risked with them  
The thing we dreaded more than death itself,  
And since unreckoning Fate has left us whole,  
And laid on them the burden and the tears  
Here do we take our solemn stand, and swear,  
By all the aching debt we owe to them,  
Ungrudging and unfalteringly to give*

*Our hands, our eyes, our limbs, our very lives  
If haply we may help to smooth their road,  
And serve to lift them through the shadowed vale  
Into the radiance of a brighter day.*



### To a V. A. D.

**M**INE is a stubborn pen,  
Mine an untutored tongue;  
I must depart again,  
Leaving our thanks unsung.

But be you well assured  
Deep in our hearts we know  
All that you have endured,  
All that you must forego—

So though our lips be dumb,  
Yet may you learn some day,  
In the long time when the world comes  
home  
All that our hearts would say.



## Our Dug-Out

**W**HEN the lines are in a muddle—as they  
very often are—

When the break's a mile away from you, or  
maybe twice as far,

When you have to sort the trouble out and fix it  
on the run,

It's great to know that you can go, when every-  
thing is done,

To a cosy little dug-out—and the subject of this  
ode—

Just a comfy little bivvy on the Lens-to-Arras  
Road,

A sheltered sandbagged doorway with the flap  
flung open wide,

And a pal to grin a greeting when you step inside.

When the weather's simply damnable—cold  
sleet and driving rain—

When the poles snap off like matches and the  
lines are down again

And you rip your freezing fingers as you work  
the stubborn wire,

It's great to get back home again, and dry off by  
the fire

In a cheery little dug-out—and you know the  
kind I mean—

With a red-hot stove a-roaring, and a floor that's  
none too clean,

A pipe that's filled and waiting and a book that  
will not wait,  
And a cup of steaming coffee if you come back  
late.

It may look a little crowded, and the roof's a  
trifle low,  
But it's water-tight—or nearly—and it wasn't  
built for show,  
And when Woolly Bears are crumping and the  
shrapnel sprays around,  
You feel a whole lot safer if you're underneath  
the ground

In a rat-proof, rain-proof dug-out—and it's  
splinter-proof as well—  
Where we got the stuff to build it is a thing I  
mustn't tell,  
But we've made it strong and solid, and we're  
cosy, rain or shine,  
In our happy little dug-out on the firing line.



## Ballad of Open Warfare

**R**UMBLING down the cobbled street,  
Lurching through the town,  
Skirting past the shadowed wheat  
Ripening golden-brown,  
Wheeling where the river runs,  
Swinging into line,  
We're the guns—the big guns—  
Heading for the Rhine!

And we're rolling over Flanders—down the  
sunset-tinted trail,  
Through the crooning woods aquiver in the  
swelling autumn gale,  
'Neath a sky of clouded amber that we scarce  
may turn to see,  
For we're rolling over Flanders on the road to  
Germany.

Clinging to the crater's edge  
Where the road was mined,  
Floundering through the slimy sedge  
With the swamp behind,  
Dropped beside the banked canal  
Just at close of day—  
We're the guns that wait your call  
Come to clear the way!

---

And we're rolling over Flanders with a grim,  
relentless stride,  
With our reeking muzzles bellowing forth our  
hate and wrath and pride  
Till the nights are flaming crimson and the dawn  
brings no release,  
For we're rolling over Flanders on the restless  
road to peace.

Rattling past the poplars gaunt,  
Through the shattered gate,  
Where the tricolore aflaunt  
Floats repatriate,  
Harrying the broken Huns,  
Screaming shrapnel hurled,  
We're the guns—the big guns—  
Monarchs of the world!

For we're rolling over Flanders, and our trail is  
blazed with fire,  
But the last long road leads homeward, and the  
end is heart's desire,  
And the line goes sweeping forward by the grace  
of such as we,  
For we're rolling over Flanders on the road to  
victory.



## There is a Cavern

**T**HERE is a cavern where the still sea lingers  
Lapping and slipping through the quiet hall,  
And whispers, in the soft-descending darkness,  
Echo from wall to wall;

There in the glory of the golden twilight  
Sweet-scented winds from far-off, filmy lands  
Come lightly to caress the dreamy waters,  
And gently kiss the sands,

And there I know, when this dread dream is over,  
I shall return—to rest; and resting find  
The old accustomed things—the hopes and  
visions  
So lately left behind—

Then when the daylight dies in saffron splendor,  
And all these tortured, fevered days are past,  
Into the glad, warm West I knew aforetime  
I shall return at last.





## Triumph

THEY have not passed! Their scornful,  
sneering lies,

Their senseless hate and blind brutality,  
Their ranting boasts and unctuous blasphemies  
Have naught availed—to us the victory!  
The suffering and the sorrow and the pain,  
The days of fear and nights of anxious dread,  
The watching and the waiting, and the strain  
Of drear uncertainty—all these are fled—

They have not passed! Though blood and fire  
and tears

And blasted hope and bitter agony  
Have been our portion through the barren years--  
Though from the mountains to the cleansing sea  
Their trail of horror sears the patient land,  
And crimson ruin marks the way they came,  
Though all they knew of heart and head and hand  
They flung against us like a scorching flame

They have not passed! O ye who died, then know  
We have been faithful to the trust ye gave,  
Nor ever faltered 'neath the sickening blow,  
Lest ye who slumber in the shallow grave  
Should wake to hear the tramp of feet profane,  
And know yourselves betrayed, and so repent  
The sacrifice—O ye for Freedom slain,  
We have kept faith, and ye may sleep content—  
They have not passed!

## A Song After Trife

**N**OW thanks be unto God, Who giveth us  
The Victory,  
And praise unto our King the Lord of Hosts  
Eternally,  
For when evil men encompassed us with chariots  
and with spears,  
When waters proud had closed upon our soul,  
He upheld us with His mighty arm throughout the  
battering years—  
His grace hath been our shield to save us whole:  
So will He make our spirits strong, when dark the  
thunders lower,  
And unto Him forever be the kingdom and the  
power  
And the glory.

When Fate flings wide the clanging door that sets  
the Terror free,  
When danger thrills the trembling sword  
awake,  
And ye who bide in placid greed and yoked pros-  
perity  
Stare helpless as the rotted barriers break,  
Ere they blind your eyes with banners, ere they  
dull your ears with words,  
Ere they bribe your cozened souls to bleat and  
drift,

As they sound the scornful challenge, raise the  
gauntlet from the boards—

Be ye swift! Be ye swift! Be ye swift!

When they whose cause had been your own, had  
they been served as ye,

Whose hands with yours were oft in friendship  
sealed,

Now prate of lofty destinies and proud humility--

And crouch in graceless safety 'neath your  
shield,

When the clamorous flood in tumult sweeps your  
trusted stays away,

And your souls be sick from watching over-  
long,

Give ye blow for blow unflinching, though ye  
front the world at bay—

Be ye strong! Be ye strong! Be ye strong!

And when adown the roaring street your con-  
quering colors go,

And ever-verdant laurel hides your scars,

When through the murk and mistiness the  
peaceful dawn rolls slow,

And glory piled on glory crowns the stars,

Ere ye beat and turn the ploughshare, ere the  
pruning-hooks be cast,

Ere ye trust in Peace triumphant to endure,

Look ye that your walls be steady, that your  
gates be firm and fast—

Be ye sure! Be ye sure! Be ye sure!

*Now thanks be unto Him Who giveth us  
The Victory,  
And praise unto His name both now and through  
Eternity,  
For in our despair He lifted us from out the fearful  
pit,  
And saved us from the deep and miry clay,  
And hath set our feet upon a rock which may not  
more a whit,  
So firmly hath He stablished it for aye.  
Now unto Him, our present help, our sure defence  
and tower,  
Throughout the echoing ages be the kingdom and  
the power  
And the glory.*



## L'Envoi

**N**OW the flame leaps on our altars, and we  
    worship as of old,  
(Though the ashes have been cold so long)  
Now the drowsy incense lingers in the embers'  
    flickering gold,  
And our murmuring voices blend in song,

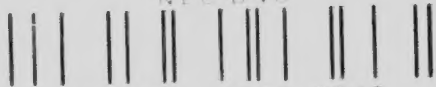
And we find the joyous echo of a careless mirth  
In the twilight when the home wind stirs,  
With our faces in the bosom of the kind old  
    earth,  
And our hearts pressed close to hers,

And our weary faces soften and our eyes grow  
    gay  
In the healing of the cool sweet dew,  
For the dreary days of bitterness have passed  
    away,  
And behold, all things are new.





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